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Summary record of the 3rd meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 15 December 2017, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Lajčák (President of the General Assembly). . . . . (Slovakia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Organization of the seventy-second regular session of the General Assembly, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items (*continued*)

Exchange of views and identification of next steps aimed at addressing gaps and duplication in the agenda of the General Assembly as they relate to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 71/323

1. **The Chair** recalled that the General Assembly, by its resolution 71/323 on the revitalization of the General Assembly, in particular paragraphs 28 and 30 on the need to enhance synergies and coherence and reduce overlap in the agendas of the Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies, had requested him to implement that mandate through consultations with all Member States and the President of the Council. At their regular meetings, he and the President of the Council had discussed the alignment of agendas in order to ensure close coordination of the two main United Nations bodies. At the current meeting he wished to hear Member States' views on how to move forward with the process.

2. Following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Assembly, in its resolution 69/321, had stressed the need to avoid duplication and overlap of agendas. The Permanent Representative of Colombia, with the support of the Chairs of the First Committee, Second Committee and Third Committee and the President of the Economic and Social Council, had led a process whose outcome had been a report on the strategic alignment of future sessions of the Assembly with the 2030 Agenda. That process had continued at the seventy-first session under the leadership of the Permanent Representatives of Argentina and Australia, resulting in recommendations that had been incorporated into General Assembly resolution 71/323.

3. Previous consultations had indicated that there was broad agreement among the Member States that the agendas of the Assembly, the Council and its subsidiary bodies could better complement one another and could have a greater impact if they reflected the structure and spirit of the 2030 Agenda. However, it was difficult to agree on an appropriate methodology through which to advance towards achieving that goal. The narrative and atmosphere of the process must be changed in order to build trust among the Members and make the necessary progress. He would continue to work closely with the President of the Council and the Chairs of the Main Committees, in particular the Second Committee and the Third Committee, and with the members of the General Committee, in order to make progress on delivering on his mandate for the realignment of agendas. It would also be necessary to take into account the ongoing processes of United Nations reform and review of the Economic and Social Council. Close coordination among all facilitators, the Secretariat and the President of the Council would be instrumental in meeting the expectations of the Member States.

4. It was his intention to appoint two facilitators to lead the process. They would be instructed to carry out consultations with the members of the General Committee and of the General Assembly more broadly. They would also consult with the President of the Council and the Chairs of the relevant Main Committees. They would provide the Member States with an opportunity to state their views in an inclusive, open and transparent manner while building on the work done at the previous sessions, taking into account any other input they deemed important for the success of their task. He wished to hear the views and comments of the members on the process and on his proposal for the way forward.

5. He took it that, because the subject matter of the discussion affected all Member States, there would be no objection to requests from non-members to take the floor and address the Committee on the matter.

6. *It was so decided.*

7. **Ms. Eckels-Currie** (United States of America) said that she welcomed the convening of a meeting on a matter of great importance to her delegation: inefficiencies in the United Nations system arising from duplication and overlap. Her delegation had called for a 50 per cent reduction in reports, conferences and negotiations. The funds saved in travel, staff, publication and translation costs alone would finance millions of dollars in new initiatives to respond to the humanitarian and development needs of people. At the current session, her delegation had taken the drastic action of disengaging from 28 of 42 draft resolutions before the Second Committee, because it had observed the same contentious issues arising repeatedly that would have no impact on development.

8. Her delegation supported reform efforts that would help better allocate scarce resources systemwide. There was a need to streamline the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the regional economic commissions, reduce staffing and establish clear mandates that would advance United Nations goals. True alignment of the work of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly was necessary in

order to remove ever-growing redundancies and overlaps in their agendas. Within the agencies, funds and programmes, the mapping agreed to in the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system should indicate ways of identifying and reducing duplication and overlap in programming, and achieving efficiencies in the implementation of programmes at the country level.

9. Her delegation did not support a merger of the executive boards of the United Nations agencies. While the Secretary-General's goal of systemwide coherence was welcomed, a merger of the boards would not achieve that result and would only weaken transparency and accountability. A merger would also dilute each agency's ability to mobilize its unique set of donors and stakeholders focused on achieving specific development and humanitarian objectives. Issues of coherence and overlap could be addressed without negatively affecting the effectiveness of the boards, including by strengthening the operational activities segment of the Economic and Social Council and giving the joint board meetings a stronger and clearer role.

10. As resources were stretched to address increasing numbers of development challenges and humanitarian crises, the United Nations could not afford to allocate resources to areas that would have little or no impact. The number of conferences, reports and negotiations had risen to a point of ineffectiveness and waste, with many overlaps and redundancies. The Member States had the power and the responsibility to reform the United Nations by reducing duplication and overlap, and it was time to begin doing so.

11. **Ms. Gueguen** (France) said that the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals were central to the work of the United Nations. Aligning the work of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council with the 2030 Agenda was therefore justified and was also consistent with the objective of achieving a more rational, more efficient and better coordinated United Nations development system. The initial steps described by the Chair had revealed gaps in the work of the Main Committees as well as overlaps, particularly in the work of the Economic and Social Council. While Member States should seek ways of increasing the effectiveness and efficiency in the work being done at Headquarters, the priority should be to continue improving the impact of the United Nations in the field and implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in accordance with the 2030 Agenda. Her delegation would support the efforts of the Chair and of the facilitators to be appointed.

12. **Mr. Hilale** (Morocco) said that the 2030 Agenda would be a fundamental document for countries' development for decades. The alignment of agendas was crucial in order to avoid duplication and the loss of energy and time. The effectiveness of the General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies lay not in repeated resolutions, reports and debates but in taking action and achieving results by reaching consensus, working together and reducing differences among the Member States.

13. The Secretary-General had undertaken reform of the pillars of United Nations activity; the Member States too must adapt their working methods and agendas. They must examine the reasons why there were ever greater numbers of reports, resolutions and discussions but fewer concrete results. The alignment process, which had begun two years earlier, had as yet yielded no results. The objective of that process was not to weaken but to strengthen the Assembly's agenda, so as to implement the fundamental resolutions and documents the Member States had approved. His delegation therefore supported the Chair's efforts and his intention to appoint two facilitators. He trusted that they would take the courageous steps necessary, because the United Nations of the twenty-first century could no longer continue to operate as though it were the United Nations of decades past.

14. The Member States had the obligation and the power to reform the Organization and its agencies, goals and structures. They must find a language and a methodology that would enable them to correct errors, gaps and overlaps. Delegations must demonstrate accountability and flexibility, and the will to achieve reform, and must take courageous decisions to that end. The reforms launched by the Secretary-General could not succeed unless the Member States also reformed the work of the Assembly, in particular by achieving the realignment of agendas.

15. **Ms. Ravilova-Borovik** (Russian Federation) said that the current process was not the first of its kind. A mandate review process that had begun following the 2005 World Summit had produced no results, because most Member States had had no interest in reviewing mandates or agendas. Her delegation had doubts that consensus could be reached in the current process. While it was important to include the 2030 Agenda in the agenda of the General Assembly, it was the Assembly's prerogative to consider any matter of interest to the Member States, regardless of whether that matter was under consideration by another United Nations body, including the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies. The revitalization process had been under way for many years with the

goal of giving the General Assembly the full authority to take crucial decisions. It would be undesirable for the current process to result in the transfer of a number of matters from the Assembly to other bodies based on the need to avoid duplication.

16. The Assembly should also analyse the possibility of considering individual aspects of the 2030 Agenda under existing agenda items, including in the Main Committees. The main issue was not duplication but a lack of organization by delegations themselves. For example, controversial human rights issues on which consensus had not been reached in the Third Committee were often taken up in the Second Committee, which by definition was not mandated to examine human rights questions. Duplication would be eliminated if delegations took a more responsible approach to their work on draft resolutions and respected the mandates of the different Committees.

17. Even when the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council considered the same matters, the two bodies had different mandates and functions. The Assembly was responsible for determining the main policy directives, while the Council was responsible for the coordination of the Organization's development work and decision-making on operational issues. Transferring to the Council part of the Assembly's agenda would also mean giving the Council responsibility for setting policy, which was properly the work of the Assembly. Even where agenda items for the two bodies had similar wording, that did not mean that there was duplication in their resolutions and decisions.

18. The strengthening of the Economic and Social Council was being considered, and should be completed, under the mandate set out in General Assembly resolution 68/1. It would not be appropriate to include the work of the Council in the process of aligning agendas with the 2030 Agenda until Member States had taken a decision on the review being conducted pursuant to resolution 68/1. Her delegation also had concerns about proposals to review the Council's high-level segment based on the argument that it was a duplication of the high-level political forum on sustainable development. While her delegation would consider constructive proposals to improve the modalities of the high-level segment, from an institutional point of view the two could not be equated, since the format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development were set out in a separate resolution: General Assembly resolution 67/290.

19. With respect to ideas expressed for reforms to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, she noted that the Committee for Programme and Coordination was the appropriate forum for consideration of expenditure and programmes. Her delegation was opposed to having the realignment of agendas with the 2030 Agenda become a comprehensive process that subsumed all matters currently under consideration by the Assembly. Her delegation welcomed the Chair's intention to appoint facilitators for the consultative process. She trusted that the process would be truly inclusive and transparent, and that the discussions would be substantive. The process should not start from zero, but rather should take into account all previous agreements reached by the Assembly concerning the Council, the Department and the 2030 Agenda.

20. While the 2030 Agenda was a crucial document, its 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets did not encompass all the tasks facing countries around the world. The Member States, in reaching consensus on the Agenda, had understood that the development system, and the United Nations system as a whole, would provide assistance with all those other issues as well. To determine now that the United Nations would work solely on the activities covered by the 2030 Agenda would be a violation of that consensus.

21. **Mr. Djani** (Indonesia) said that his delegation supported the Chair's efforts and concurred with many of the points made by the representative of Morocco. Some issues that did not require substantive consideration could be dealt with in a technical manner simply by clustering them, as the Second Committee had done at the seventy-first session, for example, by clustering several draft resolutions on tourism into a single draft resolution. In some cases substantive issues were difficult to tackle because of egos and the possibility of raising new questions and issues or re-opening old questions. At the same time, additional agenda items were being added every year.

22. The most important thing was to ensure that all the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals were discussed. The realignment of agendas was not merely a matter of seeking efficiency or cost savings but also of ensuring that past decisions were accommodated and that all matters which required discussion or implementation were taken into account. The basic materials for the process were already in place owing to the mapping exercise that had been conducted by the Economic and Social Council under the leadership of the Colombian delegation. Ultimately, it was a matter of deciding whether the Member States wanted to take action now, or leave it to the next generation of

diplomats to continue working with dozens of new agenda items.

23. The mechanism to achieve that goal could be not only to appoint facilitators but also to use the full potential of the General Committee, whose membership included a wide spectrum of Member States and represented all of the Main Committees as well as the Economic and Social Council. The current item could be a test case for bringing a new proposal before the General Committee for debate and decision-making. Whatever improvement could be achieved in the realignment process would be welcome. It was time to move forward and therefore his delegation gave the Chair its full support.

24. **Mr. Xu** Zhongsheng (China) said that the main issue was the need to increase core funding for the development system and reduce earmarked funds so that the Organization could support every country in pursuing its own chosen path and achieving its national plan for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Moreover, the work of the Assembly and the Council should serve the purpose of transforming the Millennium Development Goals into the Sustainable Development Goals. The core task in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals should be the eradication of poverty, so that the developing countries could benefit from the entire process.

25. The Department of Social and Economic Affairs — the sole department in the Secretariat whose mandate covered social and economic development — should have an enhanced role that encompassed all 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which would ensure that the Department served as a hub for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

26. Bearing in mind that the mandates of the Assembly and the Council were set out in the Charter, any improvements made to the work of those bodies must be in accordance with the Charter. He took note of the steps outlined by the Chair and expressed willingness to engage with him concerning his proposal to appoint two facilitators to coordinate that important work.

27. **Mr. Allen** (United Kingdom) said that his delegation was in favour of further aligning the Assembly's agenda with the 2030 Agenda and welcomed the Chair's decision to bring the matter before the General Committee. He concurred with the representative of Indonesia that the Committee could play a useful role in taking the initiative on the type of cross-cutting issue currently under discussion. The purpose was not to engage in cutting costs but to achieve greater effectiveness in delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals.

28. The representative of the Russian Federation was right to recall past reform efforts that had not succeeded. While failure to rationalize the agenda in the past was no reason not to try again, it was necessary to examine the reasons for the lack of success and to reassure the Member States that all issues would be fully and properly considered. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, none of the efforts undertaken in other forums to refocus the Assembly's agenda had translated into robust, concrete action that matched the ambition of the 2030 Agenda and the reform process. Most of those efforts had focused only on gaps and had failed to address the important issue of overlaps. There was a need to better understand who was doing what to deliver on development mandates and to find where the United Nations was adding value and where there was duplication, as money that was spent on the duplication of costs could instead be spent on implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in the field.

29. Although duplication might be acceptable in some cross-cutting areas, such as gender, the streamlining and elimination of redundancies or ineffective processes in other areas would enable resources to be directed towards addressing gaps in certain activities, such as energy or water. Before the Organization undertook additional activities in any area, however, it must first consider what other entities were already working in that area. The United Nations could not do everything everywhere, but could play a leadership role and ensure that gaps were addressed when they were found. That might mean marshalling and directing partners rather than adding new United Nations operational activities.

30. He concurred with the view of the representative of China that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs should be a hub for implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and looked forward to receiving information on the reform of the Department. He welcomed the Chair's proposal to appoint facilitators for the realignment process. The matter should be taken forward in the General Committee, given the lack of success so far in other forums.

31. **Mr. Castañeda Solares** (Guatemala) said that the balanced implementation of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals, in a manner that focused on the field, was extremely important to his delegation. The current exercise would enable the Member States to explore ways of implementing that Agenda effectively without undermining the implementation of other mandates. The focus should not be on cutting staff or resources but rather on better using those resources and ensuring that they were directed towards the comprehensive implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

32. The Secretary-General's report on repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda (A/72/684–E/2018/7), which responded to the mandates set out in General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review, contained excellent recommendations that could be incorporated into the Committee's work and that would enable the United Nations to better implement the 2030 Agenda, particularly by avoiding overlaps in mandates and activities. His delegation welcomed the Chair's intention to appoint facilitators and pledged its support.

33. **The Chair** thanked delegations for sharing their views. He said that the discussion had provided useful direction for the next steps in the implementation of General Assembly 71/323 and the future work of the Assembly. Having listened carefully to the deliberations, he took it that he had a mandate to appoint two facilitators to lead the process, and he would inform Member States soon of his appointments.

34. *It was so decided.*

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.